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The Indonesia Human Rights Campaign

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To East Timor solidarity groups

The Gulf War and the present focus on UN resolutions is helping to turn attention to East Timor. Even here in the UK, there is growing interest in East Timor so we have decided to use this momentum to push the issue of East Timor as hard as we can.

It is widely accepted that the Gulf Crisis can only be properly addressed by an international conference to resolve the many conflicts and issues. Likewise, we believe the time will come, perhaps as soon as the Gulf War ends, when we can push for concerted international action, possibly a conference under UN auspices, to resolve the East Timor question. Xanana has already called for discussions "under UN auspices and under conditions of a ceasefire".

The speed of current developments means that we should start preparing for this now. In furtherance of these goals, we have prepared a Backgrounder setting out the basic facts about East Timor's annexation, the UN response, and responses of key western powers. We are using this document to inform many who speak frequently on the Gulf War and who look for analogies to prove the inconsistency of the US/UK position. [The version we use in the UK has a section on 'UK policy' which has been excluded from the enclosed.] We have also issued **Occasional Reports No. 14** which reproduces the ten resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council and General Assembly since 1975 (price £1.50, including postage).

We suggest the following initiatives for your consideration and possible action:

1. To press for the implementation of all the UN resolutions, no longer concentrating on Resolution 37/30 of 1982. We take our cue from the Motion tabled this month in the Australian Senate by the Australian Democrats, which calls for endorsement of all UN resolutions on East Timor since 1975.

2. To press for an arms embargo against Indonesia. There can be no justification for selling arms to a country engaged in aggression, in violation of numerous UN resolutions.

In April, there will be a meeting of Europe-based solidarity groups in Lisbon. We hope these initiatives can be fully discussed there, that groups will have had time to consider them and, perhaps, also to have started campaigning along these lines.

Some invasions 'justified' while others are 'naked aggression'

Canberra Times 13/I-91

Ian Mathews finds some curious arguments put forward in Senator Gareth Evans's comparison of the invasions of East Timor and Kuwait.

IT WAS a simple question. Could the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade explain the difference between Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2 and Indonesia's invasion of East Timor in December 1975?

It was obviously so simple and the distinctions and differences so apparent that Gareth Evans must have wondered why Jo Vallentine asked it.

But Senator Vallentine's question is one that continues to be relevant, given the United Nations Security Council's selective set of principles.

We need to know on every occasion — and there will be more — why it is that some invasions are "necessary", "justified", "appropriate" and "in defence of democracy/the people/a small nation", while others are "naked aggression".

Senator Vallentine wanted to know whether the minister "recognised the irony of a situation where oil is involved in both disputes but, in the Gulf, Australia chose to side with the victim while nearer home the Government sided with the aggressor".

It was obvious to Senator Evans, who explained, "Perhaps the most relevant distinction is that the East Timor invasion by Indonesia was never accompanied by any United Nations resolution determining upon economic sanctions, let alone any subsequent UN resolution by the Security Council or anybody else effectively enabling the use of force in support of various objectives if they could not be peacefully achieved.

"The short point is that the international response against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait has been overwhelming and based on a perception as to the absolute intolerability of any naked aggression of the kind that was perpetrated there by one sovereign country against another."

Well, that's clear enough. If nobody cries "foul" when a country invades another, and the UN machinery gets bogged down in power plays, a successful invasion is quite acceptable. Well, almost acceptable.

"I do not seek in any way to qualify this Government's very long-standing expression of concern and unhappiness about the circumstances of the Indonesian annexation — we made that clear in 1975," Senator Evans said.

That sounds suitably indignant without giving the Indonesians any cause for concern.

Senator Evans had more reasons why Kuwait's annexation was "naked aggression", and East Timor's was just one of those things.

Jo Vallentine: demand for East Timorese self-determination.

"There are other grounds of distinction which could be drawn," he said. "... East Timor was not, of course, a sovereign country in its own right but a colonial dependency; one that had in fact been deserted by its former colonial master and in respect of which there was significant civil conflict raging between three rival groups, two of which, as I recall, favoured integration with Indonesia. So the circumstances were different."

THAT part of Senator Evans's answer is a curious justification for armed invasion. It suggests that the vacuum left by a departing colonial power should be immediately filled by the closest major force. How lucky that Hong Kong is to be handed over to China!

His recollection that two out of three warring factions favoured integration with Indonesia and therefore got what they wanted is a strange way of interpreting the wishes of the people. A fairer course — and one which one might have thought the Australian Labor Party would have favoured — would have been to wait till an election or referendum was held.

Senator Vallentine wanted to know, also, when the Australian Government would change its position on East Timor, "in line with the growing body of international opinion that is now demanding the right of the people of East Timor to self-determination".

She cited views expressed in the United States Congress and the European Community "about recognition of the rights of self-determination for the East Timorese people".

She asked, "Will the Government have the courage to admit that its silence in 1975 was a mistake and that this can be rectified by Australia taking a constructive role in settling this dispute which will not go away?"

For Senator Evans the problem was settled. He told the Senate, in words which Saddam Hussein must wistfully regret were not applied so generously to him, "... there does come a time when the reality of an annexation or an absorption of this kind has to be accepted. That time came for this country some years ago."

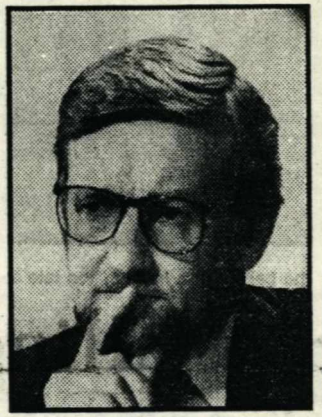
He went further (and it's one would-be aggressors ought to keep in their diplomatic armoury for future reference). "We have taken the point", he said, presumably with honesty and conviction, "that the human-rights situation in East Timor can be much better advanced and much more usefully advocated in an environment where Australia does have a working relationship with Indonesia, and one that accepts the reality of the inevitable."

Can't you hear Saddam muttering, "If only I'd told Bush and his mates that they could monitor my human-rights record in Kuwait, I'd have been quids in."

If nobody cries 'foul' a successful invasion is quite acceptable.

Senator Evans, obviously a numbers man, did say that had the international community responded with much more vigour and enthusiasm to the Timor situation in 1975, "as indeed to innumerable other international incidents over the Cold War period, the situation would be different. But that is the circumstance as we now confront it and that is the reason why we draw the distinction we do."

And he refused to accept that there was a growing body of international opinion to reverse Indonesia's aggression.



Gareth Evans: overwhelming international response to Iraq.

In other words, you only take on an aggressor if you've got the numbers. Makes sense, doesn't it? And if you tailor your selective principles to those of the pack, you're bound to be on the right side.

In what must seem to some innocents a justification for the doctrine of selective principles, Senator Evans said, "The important thing is to look now and in the future at each one of these cases absolutely on their own merits and not regard the appropriateness of international action as being governed by what may have been an inappropriate international response in the past.

"Thankfully, we are moving into a new environment where the possibility of effective international response is very great ...."

Tell that to the Palestinians!

Senator Vallentine had begun her question to Senator Evans with a reference to oil. He did not, in his answer to her, refer to Australia's vested interest in the oilfields of the Timor Gap. However, in a reply to a recent resolution of the United Nations Association of Australia on the subject, the minister put several cards on the table.

He told the association that the Timor Gap Zone of Cooperation Treaty which divides the loot of the seabed between Australia and Indonesia was in conformity with international law but did not imply "any indifference to the circumstances of the East Timorese people".

As long ago as 1986, when he was Minister for Resources and Energy, Senator Evans told Parliament, "It is perfectly consistent with Australia's recognition of Indonesia's sovereignty over East Timor to engage in negotiations with Indonesia now on the Timor Gap. To engage in such negotiations does not as a matter of international law make Australia a party to the initial acquisition by Indonesia of East Timor any more than Australia's dealings with other sovereign states make Australia a party to the means they used to acquire territory in the first place ...."

There's another *bon mot* for Saddam Hussein to remember next time. If you've got something to trade — oil for sheep and wheat, say — you've really got to make people understand that aggression shouldn't be allowed to get in the way of good business.

DR KEITH Suter, foundation director of the Trinity Peace Research Institute in Perth until recently, makes the point that, unlike the ramifications of the Kuwait dispute, few people care about East Timor.

He describes it as "one of the most blatant examples of political expediency. A minute territory in a region which already receives far less mass-media coverage than most other parts of the world, was invaded and is now claimed to be controlled by a foreign power.

"Both the invasion and the colonisation are contrary to international law, and are actions which, in other contexts, would have stimulated considerable international debate and action .... There is a far greater sense of international outrage over Iraq's invasion that Indonesia's.

"A cynic might argue that Iraq thought it could get away with its invasion precisely because Western nations have such flexible integrity when it comes to opposing invasions, such as Indonesia's invasion of East Timor.

"Western nations have no uniform policy of opposing invasions in principle. They only oppose those they do not like."

In describing the Timor affair as "one of the most appalling episodes in Australian foreign policy this century", Dr Suter makes the point that it was not in the interests of either Indonesia or Australia to have an independent nation offering itself as an example to other tenuously held Indonesian provinces.

"The invasion of East Timor has shown the continued importance of power, rather than morality, in international relations ...," he said.